

Harvey Russell and Alastair Walter provided some very useful information about Post Office directives on re-purchasing unused stamps. Also information about Post Office publications for both counter staff and the public.

I print the whole of Harvey's letter because it is "from the horse's mouth" and concise.

"The Post Office Guide was first published as a Post Office publication in 1857. I believe that it was then published intermittently until about 1901, when it became a twice yearly publication. That continued until about the First World War, when it was changed to an annual publication. It remained as an annual until its demise in the late 1980's. From its inception, it was meant to be sold to the public, as well as being used by counter staff.

In fact, when I started on the post office counter as a Postal & Telegraph Officer in 1957, after a six-week training course in a dedicated counter training school at King's Cross in London, I was given a copy of the POG - as it was universally known - and a copy of Rules for Counter Officers in Crown Offices, and told that all the information I could ever want or need was in one or other of the two books, and I was not to ask questions of the other, more experienced, counter staff as it gave the public a bad impression!

The old POG ceased publication, I believe, in about 1987. I have a copy of the 1986 edition and I believe this was the last edition for public sale. Photocopied pages enclosed from this edition show that perfinned stamps were still allowed to be used, but there is some doubt whether they would be re-purchased, since such perfinned initials (note, NOT names or trademarks) could be said to mutilate or deface the stamps.

However, the Post Office Guide for Postmasters is a different kettle of fish! This is a booklet which is NOT available to the public, and is published for the information of staff only. "

Relevant Sections from the Post Office Guide 1986 Edition.

Mutilated or defaced stamps

Postage cannot be paid by means of mutilated or defaced postage stamps. Stamps are considered defaced when marked on the face with any written, printed, or stamped characters. Perforation is, however, allowed under certain conditions; see paragraph on Perforation With Initials.

Perforation with initials

Postage stamps may be perforated with initials (but not with names or trademarks) providing that the perforating holes are no larger than those dividing one stamp from another in a sheet of stamps. The work of perforating postage stamps with initials is not undertaken by the Post Office.

Repurchase of unused or spoiled decimal postage stamps

Allowance is made under certain conditions for unused decimal postage stamps (including stamps affixed to or impressed on envelopes or other stationery) which

- a) have been purchased for postal purposes and are no longer needed, or
 - b) have been inadvertently or undesignedly spoiled/rendered unfit for use.
- No allowance can be made for stamps bought for philatelic purposes, e.g. for private collection or for speculative purposes.

..... Claims of less than £1,000 will not be accepted. 15% commission for the service. ... As far as possible small claims should be submitted in blocks or pairs.

(Ed- I wonder how much is meant by a small claim? There is no specific mention of repurchasing - or otherwise- of perforated stamps)

Alastair tells me that there is a 1986 POG in the library. He has looked on the Royal Mail website but could find no reference to repurchasing stamps at the present time.

From other items in the library he found:- in 1969 the system was very similar, but only 12Y2% commission. The 1969 guide also mentions that perfinned stamps could not be used to uprate postal orders - another reason for using perfins.

The 1890 guide gives the familiar rules that caused such trouble, although it is interesting to note that post offices were "permitted, though not compelled, to purchase postage stamps from the public (provided the stamps be not soiled or otherwise damaged)". Was this a recognition of the problem, allowing postmasters to use their discretion if they had suspicions?

In the same guide is the also familiar rule that Postmasters have been instructed not to purchase stamps with initials of firms, etc, through the stamps.

In the library is a page from The Stamp Collectors' Fortnightly for January 2nd 1904. Under the heading "Cash for Stamps" it states, The privilege of exchanging postage stamps for cash at post offices was withdrawn at the end of the last year, and they will now only be repurchased under stringent limitations. No smaller amount than one pound's worth will be accepted, the person selling them will have to fill up an elaborate form, and payment will be made by an order to be subsequently sent to the address of the vendor from the chief office. The commission will be raised from 2½% to 5%.

The change (remarks a business contemporary) is a step in the right direction. The facility with which the stamps in small amounts could be disposed of over the counter has encouraged pilfering in business establishments to a larger extent than is generally known. The new arrangement will check the practice, without any inconvenience to the public, as postal orders can now be obtained from 6d to £1, and there is no necessity whatever for remitting small amounts in postage stamps.

Alastair adds that it is strange that the £1 minimum was left unchanged for so long; from being 240 letter rate stamps in 1903 it had fallen in real value to just half a dozen first class stamps by 1986.

A further reference to the original article came from Harvey who noted that on 15th Nov 1880 the Postmaster General had authorised the scheme whereby twelve 1d postage stamps would be accepted for a deposit into a Post Office Savings Bank account, provided they were stuck onto a special deposit form, which could only be obtained from post offices. Apparently office boys or other interested parties had been using their office postage stamp stock to increase their savings accounts!

In the Post Office Circular No.209 dated 30 Nov 1880 it stated-
Postmasters must distinctly understand that Penny Postage Stamps having initials perforated through them must not be accepted for deposit purposes.

So it would appear that each loop hole for the thief of perforated stamps was slowly being closed.

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